



Clarence Brandley spent 10 years on Death Row for the slaying of a 16-year-old girl, a crime he didn't commit. Now, more than two decades after being cleared, the former custodian hopes to convince Texas lawmakers that it's time to abolish the death penalty in Texas -- or at least impose a moratorium on executions.

"To me, it's just a tool that prosecutors use to enhance their political careers," he said.

Maura Irby of Houston embodies the opposite side of the debate. Her husband, Houston motorcycle officer James B. Irby, was killed in June 1990 while making a routine traffic stop. A passenger, a paroled convict, shot him.

If the death penalty is abolished or suspended, Maura Irby said Tuesday, "what kind of message does that send to our law enforcement if we're not making it safe for them to do their jobs?"

The opposing perspectives of one of society's most contentious issues were on display Tuesday as the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee heard testimony in the first extensive death penalty hearing of the 82nd Legislature.

Texas has executed more inmates than any other state -- 446 since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976. Five have executions scheduled through midsummer, including two from Tarrant County.

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